

Camp Tom Wooten on Bull Creek

Goodall Harrison Wooten[1] was born in Paris, Texas, in 1869 and moved to Austin in 1872. Physician, philanthropist, and civic leader, in the early 1930s he was honored as "Austin's Most Worthy Citizen." Austin's Wooten Elementary is named after Dr. Wooten. A close friend of Lyman J. Bailey who organized the first Boy Scouts troop in Austin in 1911, Wooten was active in supporting the organization. In 1934, Dr. Wooten purchased for \$5,000 property overlooking Bull Creek from the Champion family[2]. The same year he presented these 125 acres to the Boy Scouts of Central Texas for use as a camp site. He also had a well dug on the property and gave more land and gifts for the camp totaling more than \$20,000. In this way the campaign for construction of cabins, buildings and improvements for a first-class scout camp was begun. The camp was named after Dr. Wooten's only son, Tom Wooten, who died in his youth.

Camp Tom Wooten was located on a peninsula – almost island feeling -- formed by a bend in Bull Creek that today is The Courtyard with street names like Tom Wooten Drive and Scout Island Circle. Frank T. Hilton is a member of the Brown County Historical Commission and hosts the *West Texas Scouting History* website with information and photos of old Camp Tom Wooten. From his website:

"The most prominent feature on the camp was a log cabin with a dog run. In front of the cabin was the flag pole on a rock base. The log cabin, having two sides, over the years [was] used as an office, a First Aid Station, a Trading Post and sleeping quarters ... Many different activities and events were held at the camp. It was the site of Tonkawa Lodge, Order of the Arrow Inductions and Fellowships ... Junior Leader Training Weekends, and Scoutmaster's Training. When the camp was new, the [Boy Scouts of America] National Aquatic School was held there."

The cabin's architecture, variously called dog-run, dog-trot or double-pen saddlebag, consisted of two log cabins connected by a breezeway (the "dog-run"), all under a common roof. This architectural style was popular especially in the hot south, including here in Texas; popular examples are those at the LBJ Ranch in Johnson City. The old log cabin was the first structure erected at Camp Tom Wooten.[3]

From a book by Te Starr (p.48) we learn that this old log cabin "was moved from the area to be flooded with the completion [in 1941] of the Mansfield dam. The log cabin was disassembled and each log was numbered to put back in proper order once transported to Camp Tom Wooten."[4]

Activities at the camp included swimming, archery, boating, a rifle range, and evening programs around a campfire. Another scouting attraction was the Lonestar Trail that stretched from Camp Tom Wooten starting at the mouth of Bull Creek west to Mansfield Dam, a straight-line distance of 6 miles, but 15 miles along the shoreline of Lake Austin. The trail is thought to have been completed ca. 1950. "The first treks from Camp Tom Wooten included donkeys that carried the food and cook gear. The Scouts hiked the trail all the way to Mansfield Dam and back again ... They took two days to hike up to the dam and two days to hike back". Each night scouts would stop at one of two Lone Star Trail kitchen shelters, establish camp for the night, and

prepare supper. The next morning, after breakfast, they would break camp and continue their trek.

Camp Tom Wooten was in operation from 1934 until 1983 at which time it was sold to the The Courtyard Tennis Center as part of Loop 360 construction; the old dining hall is now the main office of the Tennis Center; the flagpole still in place. Money from the sale went into a trust and in 1998 was used to help purchase Lost Pines Scout Reservation near Bastrop from the LCRA (Lost Pines had been leased from LCRA starting in 1967). And the old log cabin? It was moved to Lost Pines and is in good shape; a bit of Travis County history preserved and has appeared in films such as *Two for Texas*, 1998, starring Kris Kristofferson.

The next time you are at County Line on the Lake (Bull Creek), sit on the deck and gaze across Bull Creek to the property on the other side and imagine what it must have been like to be a scout at Camp Tom Wooten when Bull Creek was still a remote paradise outside of Austin. Imagine too that hike to Mansfield Dam!

Photos

Photos in this section courtesy of Frank Hilton and Te Starr. Click on photos to enlarge.



Photo ca. 1940 of scouts in front of old cabin. Dog-run breeze-way clearly visible in this photo.



The previous photo was featured in a news article, *Austin American-Statesman*, 14 Jul 1940, p.8



Color photo ca. 1966 of cabin. Dining hall visible to left is today part of Tennis Center main office



Cabin updated as it appears today at Lost Pines Scout Reservation near Bastrop. Some updates and additions were made for the movie *Two for Texas*.

Lay of the Land

Here a 1940 aerial photo has been georeferenced in Google Earth to provide a feel for Camp Wooten's layout and the location of the old cabin that was the heart of the operation. Modern street names are visible via Google Earth.



Part of 1940 aerial super-imposed on today's Courtyard. Pin shows old cabin erected in 1938 and visible here in 1940.



From that same 1940 aerial a closer view of the cabin. Click to enlarge.



Based on georeferenced 1940 aerial along with photos taken at the camp we can estimate the approximate location of the old cabin in today's Courtyard. Today's Tennis main office is a repurposing of the old dining hall which was not far from the old cabin.

Photos from The Courtyard

Bits of Camp Tom Wooten are still in place today as part of the Courtyard. Click on photos to enlarge.



Old dining hall is now Tennis Center main office.
Photo taken from near location of old cabin.



Dining hall fireplace chimney



Fireplace inside the old dining hall. Staff were uncertain if tile is from dining hall but thought so.



View from dining hall. The original flagpole visible on left, Cat Mtn to the right. Tennis courts now where the old parade ground would have been.



The dining hall had two fireplaces on opposite ends of building. Back fireplace wall furthest from old cabin here.



Base of flagpole has plaque: DONATED BY THE AUSTIN KIWANIS CLUB 1944



Rock base of old flagpole still in place



Old cabin probably located with these old oaks at the rear of the breeze-way. Cat Mtn. in distance



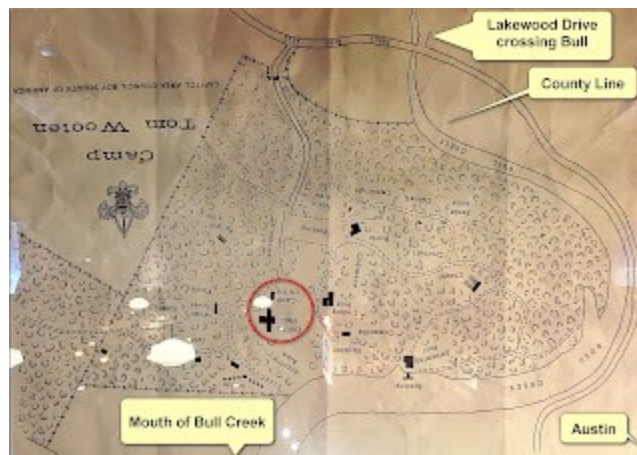
Old oak where cabin
stood; tree seems to bear
scars, perhaps of scouts
eager to exercise their
skills with an axe

Photos from County Line at Bull Creek

The County Line on the Lake (Bull Creek) has a number of photos of Camp Wooten, though some of the dates are not accurate. Apologies for glare.



Map of camp. North is DOWN



Same map with north UP and labels. Red circle is dining hall and main office, i.e. the old cabin



Photo of old dog-trot cabin. Date of 1920 not correct. Cabin erected 1938.



Another photo with cabin visible in upper left.



Boaters 1952

To learn more ...

Frank T. Hilton's *West Texas Scouting History* website provides lots of info and photos of Camp Tom Wooten. <https://westtexasscoutinghistory.net/CTW/index.html>

Starr, Te. *Making a Difference Every Day, Ninety Five Years of Central Texas Scouting, The History of the Capitol Area Council, Boy Scouts of America*. 2007. Copy available at Austin History Center.

Wooten, Dudley Goodall (1860–1929). Handbook of Texas. <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/wooten-dudley-goodall>

Wooten Elementary history. Includes more about Dr. Wooten. <https://wooten.austinschools.org/our-school/history>

The site for Camp Tom Wooten was purchased from the Champion family, early settlers on Bull Creek. For more about the Champion family and Bull Creek School / AKA Pleasant Valley School see https://traviscountyhistorical.blogspot.com/2017/10/bull-creeks-pleasant-valley-school_24.html

Footnotes

I'd like to express my thanks to Frank Hilton and Te Starr for their work in preserving this part of Travis County history and help with this article including photos.

AC Champion was an early settler on Bull Creek. Deed work pending, but the grantor was probably AC's son Charles Clark (CC) Champion (1879-1944). His father, AC Champion passed in 1926.

The provenance of the old log cabin is not totally certain. A news article from 1939 says it was erected from "cedar logs given by Adolph Kohn and the Oaks sanitarium" (Austin American-Statesman, 27 Aug 1939, p.18).